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U.S. Studying Report of 30 People Seen Fleeing Guyana After Deaths

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 30 — The United States Government is investigating an unconfirmed report that a group of 30 to 40 people were sighted moving toward the Guyana-Venezuela border shortly after the killings at Jonestown and may have entered Venezuela, authoritative Government sources said today.

The sources said that an earlier report that members of the People's Temple cult had fled Guyana by one of the cult's boats seemed unlikely.

The report under scrutiny is that a Venezuelan border patrol aircraft sighted the group, on the Sunday after the mass deaths at Jonestown, heading toward or actually at the border. The United States has asked the Venezuelan Government at Caracas to check into the matter and, initially, defense officials there said they could not confirm it. Venezuela reportedly stepped up surveillance along its eastern border to see if it could locate any people who may have entered.

Earlier, there were reports that one of the three People's Temple boats was missing and might have been used by an armed group of the Rev. Jim Jones's security guards to flee Guyana. State Department sources said that it now appeared that the People's Temple had only two boats. One was registered with the Guyanese Government under the name "Cudjo" but was known informally at Jonestown as the "Marceline," the name of Mr. Jones's wife.

Confusion Over Boat Names

"I think this confusion over the names led to the conclusion there were three boats," said one American official. He added that it seemed "unlikely" there had been an escape by sea.

The Government sources and intelligence sources also made these disclosures in interviews:

The Central Intelligence Agency relayed the first word to Washington that there had been mass deaths at Jonestown. In the predawn hours of Sunday, Nov. 19, survivors reached the Guyanese Army-Police post at Matthew's Ridge, a few miles from the Jonestown camp, with the story of the deaths.

A police officer relayed this immediately to his superiors in Georgetown, the capital, the sources said. A Guyanese police official who acts as an agent for the C.I.A. in turn reported it to agency personnel.

Electronic Surveillance Considered

At one point shortly after the killings, members of a State Department task force considered asking the National Security Agency to use its electronic surveillance to try to locate what were thought to be 300 or 400 Americans missing from the Jonestown colony. The first reports from Guyana had listed some 400 dead, while there were indications that at least twice that many people had lived at Jonestown.

The State Department had received reports from private ham radio operators that the People's Temple actually had three radio transmitters, not one, operating from Guyana. This suggested that there might have been a secret camp somewhere in the jungle.

The task force was told it would need authority from the White House to get the National Security Agency involved in any surveillance involving Americans. Before it became necessary to seek this approval, United States Army graves registration teams had discovered the hundreds of additional bodies — a total of 911 eventually were found — and the search in the jungle surrounding Jonestown ended. The three transmitters were located at the camp, on one of the cult's boats and at its house in Georgetown.

Limited Intelligence Role

Authoritative sources in the Defense Department, State Department and intelligence agencies said that despite numerous news reports of intelligence involvement, these were the only incidents where the intelligence agencies were drawn into the Guyana situation.

From a geographical standpoint, the suggestion that a group from the People's Temple could walk to Venezuela is not impossible. The Jonestown camp was approximately 25 miles from the border in an area of Guyana that has long been the source of a dispute with Venezuela.

What is unlikely, several sources said, is that a group of 30 or 40 survivors could move through the rough jungle country of southeastern Venezuela without coming into contact with settlements and attracting the attention of officials. A spokesman for the Venezuelan Embassy here said he had no confirmation that there had been entry to Venezuela by Jonestown survivors.

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run" mass suicide rehearsals in which Jonestown residents drank liquid they were told was poison.

Roberts said he has been unable to determine from the survivors or other evidence exactly how Jim Jones was shot to death. The cult leader's body was found on the platform of the commune's assembly hall in front of his green, high-backed wooden throne chair. A handgun, Roberts said, was found "nearby."

An autopsy of Jones' body could help answer the question of whether he or someone else fired the shot that killed him. It also could provide clues about physical illnesses Jones apparently was suffering from and whether he was drugged.

"We had been divided about doing autopsies," Assistant Attorney General Heymann said yesterday. "I myself wanted us to take any step—even those that in another situation might have seemed excessive—to nail down all the available evidence in this case."

In Guyana, Roberts said authorities there consider the deaths of all the children fed poison in Jonestown Nov. 18 to be murder. Adults forced against their will to take the poison also should be considered murder victims, Roberts added. Such distinctions could matter when relatives of the dead make insurance claims or file suit against what remains of the Peoples Temple.

Roberts also said police in Guyana found less than $1 million in U.S. and Guyanese currency in Jonestown and found no valuables in the heavy suitcase that three of the survivors said they were given by Jim Jones' mistress to take to the Soviet embassy. The three, who have been questioned closely by Guyanese police, said the suitcase contained gold and jewelry besides the cash found on them when abandoning the suitcase, which they found too heavy.

Guyanese police also found 32 firearms and several crossbows in Jonestown, according to Roberts. Many of the weapons were found near the bodies of men believed to be the armed guards who rounded up the Jonestown residents for the suicide ritual and forced them to stay and take the poison.

Both of the Jonestown boats also have been accounted for, Roberts said. The Marcellene, which was believed to have been missing, was another name for a fishing boat named the Cudjoe that the Guyana Defense Force found upriver from Jonestown, he said.

Heymann said that the Guyanese government has supplied U.S. authorities with fingerprint cards for most of the cult figures who entered the South American country. The fingerprint cards, plus medical and dental records will be used by technicians at Dover Air Force Base in identifying the victims.

One Justice Department official said, however, that decomposition of the bodies might make it impossible to identify positively as many as 25 percent of the 911 dead cult members at Dover.

Delaware Gov. Pierre S. DuPont IV said yesterday that he had been assured there would be no mass burial of the bodies in his state. Federal officials hope that relatives will claim the bodies and arrange for their burial individually.

Heymann noted at yesterday's briefing that the Justice Department's civil division is researching whether the government can recover the cost of transporting the bodies—an estimated $9 million—from the remaining assets of the Peoples Temple, which had real estate holdings in California and allegedly had large sums of money in domestic and foreign banks.

In California, meanwhile, seven elderly members of the cult were greeted by relatives yesterday on their return from Guyana.

Kay Johnson, a relative of one of the survivors, 78-year-old Carol Young, said she had attended a Peoples Temple meeting in Los Angeles just before the group left for Guyana.

"I thought the whole thing was phony, but you couldn't talk to her [Young] against Jim Jones. She had pictures of him all over the house," Johnson said.

Heymann noted at the briefing that the Justice Department has hesitated to investigate allegations of kidnaping and brainwashing of members of religious cults because of First Amendment protections. There is usually no sign of physical detention in such cases, he said, and what is brainwashing to one person may be a true conversion to another.

Contributing to this story was Washington Post staff writer Fred Barbash from Georgetown, Guyana.